

AD/A-004 262

LESSONS OF STRATEGIC SURPRISE: PEARL
HARBOR, CUBA AND THE 1973 MIDDLE EAST
CRISIS. REVISED VERSION

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15 December 1974

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER ACN 74C36	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) Lessons of Strategic Surprise: Pearl Harbor, Cuba and the 1973 Middle East Crisis (MIRM 74-9-R)		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED Military Issues Research Memorandum
7. AUTHOR(s) Kenneth E. Roberts		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS Strategic Studies Institute US Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		12. REPORT DATE 15 December 1974
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 30
		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) Unclassified
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report) Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES None		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Political, military, intelligence, economic and sociological factors, long- range strategic planning.		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Strategic surprise succeeded for the aggressor at Pearl Harbor, in the Cuban Missile Crisis, and in the 1973 Middle East Crisis, not because American military and diplomatic policymakers were uncertain about what the enemy was planning but because they were all "too certain." Researchers in the areas of belief systems and decisionmaking have long held that analysts seldom review incoming information objectively. Instead, such information is usually unconsciously fitted into preexisting intelligence positions and preconceived		

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behavior patterns or else simply disregarded as irrelevant or erroneous. This study attempts to validate and expand these conclusions, to examine reasons for the successes and failures of diplomacy, and to identify relevant trends and commonalities in these three crises upon which to base useful recommendations for improved strategy formulation. In each case, it was found that the actors responded (1) on the basis of their own national interest, (2) within the constraints of a short timeframe, and (3) with a rather limited choice of alternatives. Each crisis was preceded by numerous indicators which were incorrectly analyzed by US officials because of preconceived notions, stereotypes, and personal biases. Enemy analysts also misperceived US national and popular will to resist their strategic challenge.

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by

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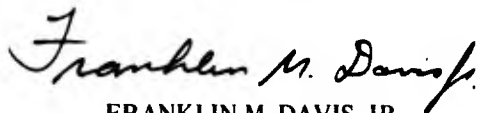
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FOREWORD

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This research memorandum, written by Mr. Kenneth E. Roberts who is assigned to the Strategic Studies Institute, is a revised version of an earlier study on the same subject.



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LESSONS OF STRATEGIC SURPRISE: PEARL HARBOR, CUBA AND THE 1973 MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

Strategic surprise succeeded for the "aggressor" at Pearl Harbor, in the Cuban Missile Crisis, and in the 1973 Middle East Crisis. The key to understanding the significance of these crises for future strategic planning lies primarily in an examination of the roles played by intelligence processors and decisionmakers rather than the failure of the intelligence gatherers or technology. Researchers in the areas of belief systems and decisionmaking such as Ole Holsti and Roberta Wohlstetter have long held that analysts seldom can review incoming information objectively. Instead, such information is often unconsciously fitted into preexisting intelligence positions and preconceived behavior patterns or else simply disregarded as irrelevant or erroneous. This article analyzes three key crises in an attempt to discuss, evaluate, and expand these conclusions, to briefly examine reasons for diplomatic successes and failures, and to identify relevant trends and commonalities upon which to base useful recommendations for improved US strategy formulation.

PEARL HARBOR, 1941

The United States and Japan began drifting toward conflict after Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, but President Roosevelt

anticipated continued resistance by China and growing impatience among the Japanese public and Navy with the sacrifices required for Japan's aggressive policies. During the winter of 1940-41, the situation became more serious despite continued opposition to war in the United States. Subtle warnings and attempts to negotiate were coupled with sanctions, but America's terms for peace were irreconcilable with Japanese interests and strategy.

A number of proposals for peace were considered and rejected between April 9, 1941 and November 20, 1941. After July 26, 1941, President Roosevelt froze all Japanese assets in the United States, closed all US ports to Japanese vessels, and proclaimed a strict embargo on the sale of American petroleum products to Japan. This action forced Japan to accept American demands for withdrawal from China and Indochina or obtain raw materials elsewhere. The Japanese desperately needed oil, scrap iron, bauxite, and other raw materials to expand their economy and to maintain their military forces. The world depression had already made it difficult for the Japanese to export their products abroad. The roots of the Pearl Harbor attack lay in a chain of events resulting from opposition to and misperception of these interests by the United States.¹ The United States could not accept the creation of a Japanese sphere of "coprosperity" in the Far East which Japan felt was so essential to her survival and economic growth. Successive, stricter embargoes challenged rather than restrained Japan's aggressive policies.

The Japanese felt that US political power, based on democratic principles, was weak; consequently, they had little respect for it. US efforts to avoid "creating an incident" seemed to confirm these views.² They were cognizant of superior US military strength, but gambled the American people would decide against fighting a long war. Japanese strategy, therefore, sought to resist a counteroffensive as long as necessary in order to grind down US morale.

Roberta Wohlstetter has written perhaps the best study to date on the cause and impact of the intelligence failure at Pearl Harbor. She argues that the United States failed to anticipate Pearl Harbor because all the signals were imbedded in an atmosphere of "noise" not for want of relevant information but rather because of overabundant, irrelevant data. In Washington, the signals from Pearl Harbor were competing with signals from Europe. In Honolulu, the competition was with signals indicating a Japanese attack on Russia and expectations of local sabotage.³

The data provided by American intelligence agents was "excellent," and the breaking of top priority Japanese diplomatic codes enabled US strategists to expect an attack. Although there were warnings that the attack would occur at Pearl Harbor, few diplomatic or military analysts anticipated such a bold maneuver. Intelligence resources available to the United States included top priority Japanese worldwide diplomatic and intelligence codes; radio traffic analysis which located the various Japanese fleets; economic and political analysis provided by Ambassador Grew in Tokyo; various military attaches and observers throughout Asia; results of British and other foreign intelligence; information provided by experienced businessmen, foreign correspondents, and newspapermen; the Japanese press; and intergovernmental personal contacts. Japanese intelligence operating from Honolulu also supplied military authorities in Tokyo with accurate, detailed information on US deployments in Pearl Harbor and advised of the likelihood of a successful surprise attack on the facility.

In late November, 1941, Ambassador Grew and US intelligence sources warned that a surprise aggressive movement might suddenly emerge from Japan. The United States intercepted a message from Japan to Ambassador Nomura in Washington on November 5, 1941 which stated that the deadline for diplomatic agreement with the United States was November 25; this deadline was later extended to November 29. A message intercepted on December 6 from Japanese intelligence in Honolulu advised Tokyo that the opportunity for surprise attack against Hawaii was good. The Japanese 14-Part Message, decrypted in Washington on December 6 and 7, 1941, convinced the President of the immediacy of war. Other well-known fragments of intelligence pointing to a Japanese attack included large troop and ship movements in Indochina and along the China coast, changes in Japanese naval call signs, and a radio silence in the Japanese Navy.⁴

Japan's decision to attack Hawaii first rather than move directly south was primarily a strategic gamble that a direct attack on the US Pacific Fleet in Hawaii would achieve maximum immediate destruction. It culminated an opportunistic foreign policy of probing for weaknesses, disguising aims, and moving cautiously in search of an expedient time to act. The United States was reluctant to go to war until given no alternative. By 1941, however, the strength of isolationism had diminished. The American people were generally aware that the talks with the Japanese were ending in the days before Pearl Harbor, but were not told the nation might soon be at war. The lack of

public belligerency perhaps contributed to the Japanese misperception of American will. The surprise attack, however, served to unify a previously divided American public behind the war effort.

CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS, 1962

American intelligence supplied Washington with accurate, fairly detailed information on Soviet actions in Cuba prior to the October 14 overflight which conclusively proved the existence of Soviet offensive missile installations. The quality of the photographs proved the validity of US charges. Timely discovery of the construction precluded a more serious crisis, inevitable if the United States had been faced with completed bases fully protected by surface-to-air missiles. US intelligence analysts and decisionmakers failed, however, to accurately evaluate Soviet strategy prior to the crisis. They either misunderstood or disregarded factors which might have led the Soviet Union to undertake gambles to improve its politico-military posture because of the persuasive belief that the Soviet Union would not deploy strategic weapons in Cuba.

Cuban relations with the Soviet Union warmed noticeably after Defense Minister Raoul Castro's visit to Moscow in July. Subsequently, refugee groups claimed that Soviet military "technicians" were arriving in Cuba in large numbers and later that these "technicians" were actually part of military units constructing bases in Cuba. Intelligence experts largely discounted these reports due to lack of definitive proof, a distrust of the motives of the refugees, the national policy of coexistence and its influence upon their perceptions, and the undependability of untrained observers.

As is now well known, Navy air reconnaissance photographed all ships visiting Cuba during the summer of 1962. High-level U-2 overflights were conducted, and by late September US intelligence had evidence of large numbers of Soviet military personnel, surface-to-air missile sites, and IL-28 light bombers in Cuba. Despite the fact that early reliable information on the number of Soviet troops and equipment was difficult to obtain, certain "signs" might have been detected earlier if American intelligence analysts and foreign policy decisionmakers had been more ready to intellectually accept the introduction of strategic missiles into Cuba. One such sign was that many Soviet ships arriving in Cuba were riding high in the water, indicating they were carrying space-consuming cargo.

In summary, refugees, press reports, foreign intelligence sources on the ground, and US reconnaissance and visual observation increasingly indicated that the USSR intended to install offensive surface-to-surface missiles in Cuba.⁵ The Soviet Union claimed only to be interested in maintaining Cuba's sovereignty, but risked a carefully constructed policy of peaceful coexistence during the missile crisis to strengthen its hand in a global strategic sense. Like Pearl Harbor, the United States failed to anticipate the Cuban crisis and recognize the signals, not because relevant information was lacking, but because irrelevant data was profuse and American officials were predisposed to interpret the information in terms of certain expectations.

During the short decisionmaking period, the American public was generally aware that US relations with Cuba were becoming more strained, but were not officially told the Soviet Union had placed offensive missiles in Cuba. As soon as the American leadership and public became aware of the Soviet offensive buildup, many envisioned the possibility of another Pearl Harbor-type attack against the United States. Americans strongly supported the President's position once the nature of the crisis became apparent; those critical of his actions primarily felt stronger steps should have been taken. American public reaction undoubtedly served as one factor forcing Khrushchev to moderate his position on Cuba.

Khrushchev also seriously misjudged the leadership abilities and determination of President Kennedy, probably because of his failure to react forcefully to the Bay of Pigs crisis and to the Berlin Wall construction, and because of personal impressions gained at their summit meeting in Vienna. These impressions, combined with a general misunderstanding of the strengths of democracies during periods of crisis, led the Soviet Union to attempt to effect a major strategic realignment in Cuba.

The superior US military position in the Caribbean prior to the completion of the Cuban missile installations was well understood by Moscow. Soviet strategists were convinced that their secrecy and deception and the rapidity of construction would preclude any effective US response, however. This conclusion was strengthened by the US failure to respond to the previous buildup of conventional defensive weapons systems. When the nature of the threat became evident and the decision was made by the President to use force if necessary, various deployments were hurried to make US determination credible to the Soviet Union. The USSR had no real conventional

military option with which to challenge the American threat once confrontation emerged. Neither air protection nor naval escorts were available to break the US blockade. Tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba may have offered some defense to the island, but the massive US preparations being readied for a possible invasion gave Khrushchev clear evidence of his military inferiority in the area.

Six alternatives were available to the United States as means of meeting the Soviet challenge:⁶ (1) Do nothing; (2) Protest to the United Nations, to Cuba, or to the Soviet Union directly; (Diplomatic protest was used in conjunction with more direct, forceful action, to legitimize the US position.) (3) Make "surgical" air strikes on the missile installations; (4) Invade Cuba; (5) Enforce a maritime blockade of all traffic entering Cuban territorial waters; or (6) Enforce a quarantine to stop only those Soviet ships delivering missiles to Cuba. This latter policy was chosen as the primary US strategy because it could be implemented immediately, but permitted a more controlled military escalation and greater political flexibility; placed the burden of the next step with the Soviets; was viewed as moral and legal; was the most credible response least likely to escalate into nuclear war and allowed time for strengthening US conventional forces.

The United States also utilized economic pressures to make it more difficult for the Soviet Union and others to supply Cuba. During September 1962, the State Department sought to persuade Western nations to reduce or terminate shipment of supplies to Cuba. The embargo denied US Government financing and cargoes to ships trading with Cuba; refused the use of US port facilities to the ships of any nation carrying military supplies to the island; refused entry into its ports to any ship delivering nonmilitary Communist cargoes to Cuba on the same continuous voyage; and banned all American ships and American flag ships from carrying supplies of any type to or from Cuba. The embargo presented a serious challenge since most shipping to Cuba was done in non-Communist flag ships. There is little indication that the embargo had any real impact on subsequent decisionmaking, however.

Thus, the United States skillfully combined diplomatic initiatives and military threats in a strategy to force a Soviet retreat in an unanticipated crisis. The Soviet Union, confronted with the American response and lacking a conventional capability in the area or global strategic parity, was forced to withdraw or face the unacceptable risk of nuclear war.

MIDDLE EAST CRISIS, 1973

The 1973 Middle East crisis is yet another example of misinterpretation of adequate, available intelligence. Few US or Israeli intelligence analysts and decisionmakers believed the Arabs were ready to risk another war. Despite warnings and signals of approaching conflict, the United States interpreted these in terms of preconceived notions, experience, and expectations. The national policy of detente with the USSR encouraged skepticism toward predictions of another Arab-Israeli war. Misperception of European reaction also served to embarrass American "predictors," and time was lost in the resupply of Israel because improvised routes had to be developed.

A number of signals conflicted prior to the 1973 Middle East War, as prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor and the discovery of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba, which, in retrospect, appear to be unmistakable warnings of aggression. In September, Egyptian and Syrian reconciliation with King Hussein of Jordan, after nearly two years of hostility, marked the initiation of a new phase of Arab rapprochement. King Faisal, on the other hand, began to indicate his desire to use oil as a political weapon by freezing current production levels unless the United States showed a willingness to revise its Middle East policy and follow a more even-handed approach in Arab-Israeli disputes.

The Egyptians moved large quantities of tanks, armored personnel carriers, guns, and trucks to within a few miles of the canal in late September. These movements were first viewed as a part of predicted training exercises which have been carried out annually by the Egyptian Army. Israeli forces were put on alert, but there was no general mobilization. A predicted Arab spring offensive had failed to materialize and most Israelis felt the danger had passed for the year. The indications of attack this time were clearer, however. Perhaps the strongest signal was the massive Soviet airlift from Damascus and Cairo to return home virtually all Soviet military personnel from Syria and Egypt during the few days preceding the outbreak of hostilities.

The primary impact of surprise in the October War was that the Israelis suffered a series of initial setbacks which were costly to reverse and were forced to recognize that their military security would be increasingly difficult and costly to maintain in the absence of an acceptable political settlement. Secondly, the confidence gained by the Arabs in these early victories helped eliminate some humiliation

remaining from the June 1967 war. The assumption that the Arabs would be branded as aggressors and condemned by world opinion, as a result of the surprise attack, was not realized to the degree expected by the Israelis. Perhaps this was because much of the world perceived the Arabs to be attempting to regain their own territory occupied by Israel since 1967 or because of a desire not to be the target of the new-found Arab weapon of "petropolitics."

The primary US national interests in the Middle East at stake in the October 1973 War were the prevention of any single power or coalition of powers from gaining hegemony in the region and the maintenance of Israel's security and independence. The United States felt that the massive Soviet airlift of arms and equipment would upset the tenuous balance achieved in the region between the Arabs and Israelis. A resupply of Israel was therefore initiated to prevent her defeat or the loss of such territories as would endanger her existence in future wars or at the peace table. The stated Soviet intention to intervene directly in the fighting posed a serious threat to US interests. President Nixon, as a result, took both diplomatic and military action to warn the Soviet Union of the consequences of intervention.

The USSR has long desired to gain a foothold in the Middle East for geopolitical, military, and psychological reasons. Expanded influence there has strengthened Soviet credibility as a world power and rendered obsolete the old American policy of containment. Reports vary concerning Arab coordination with the Soviet Union prior to the attack, but the Soviet troop evacuation and the arrival of the Soviet sealift of new military supplies simultaneously with the outbreak of hostilities support the contention of foreknowledge and approval. When a direct confrontation with the United States became a danger, however, the USSR recognized no serious threat to Arab territories or any of its legitimate positions in the Middle East existed, and chose to accept UN mediation rather than pursue unilateral enforcement of a cease-fire and risk US retaliation.

President Nixon assigned an important role to military as well as political power in the resolution of the Middle East conflict by responding quickly to counter Soviet supply activities to the Arab combatants and by ordering a full worldwide military alert on October 25, 1973, to demonstrate US determination to oppose any unilateral Russian intervention. It appeared relatively certain that the Soviet Union was determined to put troops in the Middle East. Had the Soviets not perceived this reaction as credible, the political resolution achieved would have been endangered.

The US public, in general, is sympathetic to Israel and supports the policy of detente with the Russians and keeping the great powers in control of the situation. During the most serious hours of the crisis, the improvement in US-Soviet relations was a major factor in the avoidance of a confrontation between the two countries. Mutual interest in the preservation of detente, after the United States displayed its determination in a show of force, allowed a peaceful resolution by political means. Summits and special emissary exchanges were utilized to maintain communication with the Soviets and both sides of the Arab-Israeli confrontation throughout the crisis. Both the United States and the USSR modified their previous positions concerning Israeli withdrawal by jointly sponsoring the UN cease-fire resolution.

Thus, in the face of Arab and Soviet threats, the United States chose to match the Soviet resupply effort to the Arabs by stepping up delivery of previously ordered supplies to Israel and authorizing additional aid; to put in force military readiness preparations to counter possible Soviet unilateral intervention; and to initiate intense political and diplomatic action on all fronts. These actions represented the limits to which the US public and Congress would go without a more defined threat, but they served to warn the Soviet Union of American determination to protect its interests in the region.

The time for decisionmaking in the 1973 Middle East crisis was brief. The United States had to react quickly after the initiation of hostilities to prevent the Soviet airlift from upsetting the regional balance of forces. In the later stages of the crisis, quick American reaction was required to respond to the threat of Soviet intervention. It was necessary to insure that US intentions were well understood and to avoid being confronted by a Soviet fait accompli. In the final stages of battle, time became more critical as arrangements for a cease-fire attempted to keep pace with a fluid military environment. Time was important to the Israelis also because they felt that the world clamor for a cease-fire would quickly become irresistible. For both the Israelis and the United States, the surprise resulted in a reexamination of intelligence gathering and evaluation methods. It served to strengthen the mistrust many US decisionmakers have felt toward military intelligence since Pearl Harbor.

CRISIS CONSTANTS

Without a sound understanding of motivation and strategy in addition to capabilities, even the most accurate intelligence data on

economic development, technological sophistication, and military arsenals is useless. In all three crises, analysts and policymakers spread both the intentions of the adversary and his willingness to take risks. A comparison reveals a number of apparent constants which may be useful in future strategy formulation and crisis decisionmaking.

Each nation pursued its own national interests first. Prior to Pearl Harbor, both the British and the Dutch became disturbed because President Roosevelt consistently refused to state the conditions under which the US would enter the fight or supply assistance if their Eastern possessions were attacked. At Singapore, the United States and Great Britain were unable to agree on a common strategy in the Far East because of differing interests.

The United States reacted unilaterally at first in the Cuban Missile Crisis since vital security interests were threatened and since the need for secrecy and swift decisions for action made it impossible to hold prior consultations on a global scale. President Kennedy sought to retain control of decisionmaking, but realized that international organizations and diplomatic consultations could be very helpful in bringing about international understanding of the US position. That is why the US delegate to the United Nations promptly explained in detail to that organization the nature of the crisis, the US position, and why this country's actions were consistent with the UN charter, and, why the United States welcomed so strongly the support given this country by the Organization of American States. There is no evidence that Khrushchev sought the opinions of his Warsaw Pact allies before deciding to install missiles in the Western Hemisphere. Even during the actual crisis, the Soviet Union displayed disregard for Castro by failing to consult with him.

American allies in Europe generally viewed their primary interest in the Middle East as continued access to Arab oil; thus, not all of them cooperated with the United States. This disunity in the West limited the credibility of threats of possible counter-boycotts. European nations, especially France, criticized the United States because events in the Middle East were controlled by the United States and the Soviet Union without consulting other interested parties. The final cease-fire was arranged primarily by the two superpowers.

- Fears of encirclement and containment influenced action and reaction. Perceptions of an Anglo-American policy of encirclement against Japan in the Southern Pacific Ocean frequently appear in official Japanese documents and memoirs. Such a threat, whether real

or imagined, was certain to be taken seriously by an insular power such as Japan.

President Kennedy felt that the Soviet Union sought to encircle the West by subverting the world's developing nations. Cuba, of course, was the primary Soviet base of subversion in Latin America. Many American officials felt the Russians were simply reversing the old US policy of containment adopted by the State Department after the Second World War.

The US policy of containment sought to weaken the Soviet's viability as a world power by preventing the expansion of Russian influence to neighboring states. Greece, Turkey, and Iran were focal points of US efforts. Detente and increased sophistication and capabilities have allowed the Soviets to "leapfrog" this "line of defense" and attempt to establish a power base in the Middle East. Psychologically, militarily, and geopolitically, this was a natural, opportunistic move which led to their support for Arab demands against Israel. Influence in that region may also be viewed as part of a Soviet plan to encircle the Peoples Republic of China.

- Previous false alarms, alerts, and a numbness from facing repeated international crises served to dull reaction before aggressive action was taken. In the weeks prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Admiral Kimmel and his forces in Hawaii investigated several false reports of Japanese submarines in the vicinity of Pearl Harbor. They doubted chances of a Japanese attack and viewed such alarms as serious irritants to their normal duties.

Likewise, Cuban refugees had been reporting Russian missiles in Cuba for more than a year and a half prior to the first official sightings. Stated goals of Cuban refugee groups and lessons learned from the Bay of Pigs invasion made American analysts particularly skeptical.

The Israelis had received various signals forecasting an imminent Arab attack for more than six months prior to the October War. Every time such a signal was received, the government had to make a decision on mobilization, which in Israel means disruption of the whole nation. The tense situation in general made all predicted attacks suspect.

- The role played by deception was always significant. Prior to Pearl Harbor, the Japanese gave shore leave to a number of Japanese sailors, issued false war plans to Japanese commanders, reinforced the northern border of Manchuria, engaged in false radio communications and negotiation, and utilized other methods of deception to hide their true intentions. They expected these tactics to confuse US intelligence analysts.

In Cuba, the Soviets used trees, tarpaulins, camouflage nets, paint, and mud to alter the missiles' natural shape. Cubans were kept from the docks while unloading was taking place and all movements occurred at night. As late as September, the Soviet Union continued to insist that there was no real need for offensive bases in Cuba since her nuclear arsenal possessed sufficient forces to destroy any foe. The Russians expected that the publicized defensive buildup would serve to shroud the introduction of strategic weapons into the Caribbean.

The Egyptians used sand colored netting to hide their equipment from Israeli aircraft and observation posts on the east bank of the Suez Canal in an attempt at secrecy. Prior to the outbreak of fighting, President Sadat of Egypt seemed to have embarked upon a new campaign of moderation: Soviet advisers were expelled, the Egyptian-Libyan unification proposal was abandoned, and new diplomatic initiatives were begun with Saudi Arabia and Jordan. A major policy speech by Sadat suggested moderation toward the United States, and a US firm, the Bechtel Corporation, was awarded the concession to build the new "Suez to the Mediterranean" oil pipeline. Significant indications had been received by Secretary of State Kissinger that the Arabs were ready to negotiate. It should be pointed out that Bechtel Corporation's relationship to the project was later changed to that of management for a fixed fee; under Bechtel supervision, an Italian consortium was awarded the contract in early 1974.

- Unexpected technological, tactical, and logistical capabilities facilitated surprise. At Pearl Harbor the United States failed to realize that the Japanese had been able to put fins on their torpedoes, thus making attack in shallow harbors feasible, and that the radius of the Japanese Zero fighter plane had been extended to 500 miles. Japanese pilot training, radar, and aircraft carrier capacity were also underestimated. The greatest military surprise the United States encountered in Cuba was the unexpected Soviet capability to build missile sites at such a rapid pace.

The effective Egyptian use of the surface-to-air missiles as a substitute for air cover was a surprise of comparable significance. The United States and Israel were impressed with Arab firepower and their seemingly unlimited ammunition and anti-tank missiles supply. Egyptian jamming, electronic countermeasures, and their nighttime and commando skills were also unexpected. Surprises in morale, degree of coordination, tactics, and toughness enabled Arab forces to make their initial gains.

- The presence of oil, embargoes, and economic pressure is important in all three crises. The Japanese strike at Pearl Harbor was directly influenced by increasingly stringent American embargoes of petroleum products, scrap iron, and other resources vital to Japan's economic growth. With these vital supplies halted, Japan was forced to look southward. Pressures in Japan mounted for war since time was on the side of the United States. Although US-British-Dutch boycotts of Japanese goods and embargoes on vital resources were aimed at forcing a change in Japanese policies, they had the effect of challenging Japan to regain her honor and economic self-sufficiency in whatever manner necessary.

It may be argued that US use of a comparable boycott aimed at Cuba prior to the crisis had a similar effect. It served to evoke a challenge to Fidel Castro and to insure that he would be forced to accept total dependence on the Soviet Union.

The United States is in a distinctly different position in the Middle East. This time "petropolitics" was used by the Arab nations against the West. The United States miscalculated the Arabs ability and determination to carry out their threats. The US reaction indicates that this embargo was also viewed as a challenge. It had no real military significance, and, by itself, affected no significant political or economic readjustments.

- Perhaps the most important constant is the role played by "behavioral surprise" or "apparent behavioral surprise" in each of these three situations. Research in decisionmaking theory and crisis diplomacy during recent years has made great strides toward analyzing strategic surprise. Ole R. Holsti developed the following hypothesis from his study of Dulles: "Individuals tend to assimilate new perceptions into a body of familiar ones and to interpret what is seen in such a way as to minimize the clash with previous expectations."⁷ Klaus Knorr has developed a similar theme in his concepts of "technical surprise" and "behavioral surprise." "Technical surprise" is defined as "one not incompatible with the prevalent set of expectations. It occurs because the opponent was successful in concealing a particular capability." "Behavioral surprise," on the other hand, "occurs when the opponent's behavior is incompatible, or seems to be incompatible, with our set of expectations." "Behavioral surprise" occurs when the opponent acts highly irrationally or with unexpected irrationality: when intelligence is based more on stereotypes than objective perceptions; and, when an opponent's behavior is altered due to

leadership or other important changes, and our expectations, though previously correct, do not recognize the shift.⁸ Another condition which might also be added to Knorr's definition is a case in which an opponent acts with unexpected rationality.

The strategic surprises encountered at Pearl Harbor, in Cuba, and in the Middle East may be interpreted either in terms of "behavioral surprise" or "apparent behavioral surprise," a case in which one party adopts a course of action which seems to conflict with our set of expectations but actually does not. The US War Council concluded on November 25 that "the Japanese attack would fall on Siam, Malaya or the Dutch East Indies rather than the Philippines."⁹ American policymakers felt that Pearl Harbor was really more of a deterrent than a target and that Japan would attack the British first. Evidence to the contrary given by an Army intelligence report in the fall of 1941 was dismissed by policymakers. Such a bold move by the Japanese was regarded as too radical a departure from normal behavior to be taken seriously.

Installation of offensive missiles in Cuba by the Soviet Union was likewise considered irrational and improbable. The Stennis Report on the crisis attributed the failure to predict Soviet moves to certain "preconceptions" of the intelligence community. A "substantial error" was noted in "the predisposition of the intelligence community to the philosophical conviction that it would be incompatible with Soviet policy to introduce strategic missiles in Cuba."¹⁰ President Kennedy expected the Soviet Union to attempt subversion rather than direct confrontation.

The role of behavioral surprise is also important in the 1973 Middle East crisis. Terrorist attacks and sabotage were expected, but the Arabs were badly defeated in June 1967 and most US "experts" were convinced that no new full-scale attack would be launched in the near future. Stereotypes against the Arabs also led to mistaken conclusions about Arab fighting ability and Soviet willingness to aid them. Four categories of behavioral surprise emerge from the crisis:

- The individual Arab soldier was widely believed to be the weak link in the military organization.
- Politically, US and Israeli planners perceived Arab weaknesses as a result of their previous inability to coordinate among themselves.
- Although fairly accurate information was available on Arab equipment, the United States and Israel were surprised at the Arabs' ability to use it.

- Finally, we believed in Israeli superiority and felt the Arabs also recognized it and would defer any future adventures until in a stronger military position.

LESSONS LEARNED

The following conclusions appear valid, but should be repeatedly tested against the environment, events, and outcomes of other past and future crises. Although most of these propositions are not new, they have been revalidated by the conduct and outcome of the October 1973 Middle East War.

Political lessons.

- The advantage falls to the actor initiating the surprise aggression in diplomacy as well as in military strategy. The timing of initial use of force is primary.
- No "ultimate" intelligence resource is useful without sound political and behavioral analysis.
- In times of crisis, intra-alliance communication is subordinated to the national interest. The cost is high in terms of alliance unity, trust, and effectiveness.
- Direct and constant communication between national leaders during times of crisis reduces the potential for war. Despite secret Japanese pressure for a Konoye-Roosevelt meeting, the President followed the advice of Secretary Hull and Ambassador Grew and avoided such an encounter on the basis that it would only serve to further complicate the foreign policy situation and, if unsuccessful, would further the interests of Japanese militarists who were arguing that diplomacy's failure was inevitable. The Cuban Missile Crisis, due to improved communication, was marked by a new form of high-level, person-to-person diplomacy. President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev discussed the crisis and proposed solutions in direct exchanges. At one point in the crisis, events were occurring at such a fast pace that diplomacy was conducted via ordinary shortwave radio in order to speed the exchanges. During the 1973 Middle East Crisis, Secretary Kissinger and Assistant Secretary Sisco went from capital to capital, first to Moscow and then throughout the Middle East.
- Ad hoc foreign policy decisionmaking is common during periods of crisis. In such situations, the power of the President generally predominates over Congress. Formation of key groups and consolidation of decisionmaking in the hands of a few are required to avoid bureaucratic formalities.

- Reputation and experience of decisionmakers and government officials can be determining factors in the conduct of crisis diplomacy.

Psychological lessons.

- Potential adversaries must be made aware of US bureaucratic and public will and determination through the maintenance of a flexible military force and the education of an informed, aware, and vocal citizenry. Diplomatic bluffs, official secrecy, and public silence invite strategic challenge.

- It is not often easy to discern the reasons for strategic surprise. We must therefore learn to live with uncertainty since crises seldom develop as predicted.

- Facts tend to be interpreted in terms of preconceived ideas and impressions.

- A tendency exists to overestimate the degree of actual common interest among nations.

- Past successes may lead to overconfidence which will cause a strong reaction when those earlier victories are not repeated or sustained and their achievements are threatened.

Military lessons.

- A counterproductive tendency toward overspecialization among intelligence analysts exists. This is particularly true of civilian analysts who have dealt exclusively with one country or region for many years and find it difficult to predict unusual or changing behavior which does not fit traditional patterns.

- Long-range planning is greatly needed. Such planning allows decisionmakers to perceive more options and grants more time for choice and commitment. If the choice proves wrong, mistakes can be rectified more easily.

- Military operations and strategy should be structured to provide opportunities for graduated options clearly identifiable to an opponent. Actions should be avoided which might be incorrectly interpreted as a precursor to large-scale warfare. Restraint and limited use of force, requisites of a measured response, should be valued.

- Military strategy should be coordinated and coupled with complementary political and economic strategies in an overall plan to achieve a limitation of crisis escalation. Military actions should clearly demonstrate US resolution to achieve whatever specific objective the President has chosen. If these actions are ambiguous, the adversary may conclude that the United States is seeking objectives greater than those stated or that it is unwilling to accept less than demanded.

- The requirement for quick action to meet sudden danger is necessary to gain time, develop options, and retain the flexibility to utilize or cope with further pressures.

- The necessity of maintaining forward deployed forces and strategic mobility remains essential to the protection and projection of military power.

- On-the-ground intelligence cannot be replaced totally by either aerial or electronic surveillance.

Economic lessons.

- Economic embargoes, though of increasing importance, are seldom successful and frequently counterproductive.

- The importance of economic interdependence is demonstrated during periods of political and military crisis.

One conclusion which may seem obvious should not be made that Soviet pressure should be countered wherever it is met by approaching the brink of war and daring the Soviets to make a move. In Cuba, and to a lesser degree in the Middle East, the United States held certain advantages. This will undoubtedly not be true in all future crises, and the decision concerning the most appropriate action should be based upon each peculiar situation and the relative merits of the alternatives as they exist at the time.

TRENDS

Certain discernible international trends seem to emerge from an examination of these crises. These trends are both positive and negative:

- The analysis of these crises points to an increasingly important role for international diplomacy in future crises. The new emphasis on skilled statecraft has been precipitated by greater high level, personal diplomacy, the advent of the "hot line" and other improved methods of communication, and the extraordinary and improvised techniques of diplomacy exercised by Henry Kissinger.

- The great powers continue to show increasing responsibility in crisis handling.

- Continuing distrust of military intelligence by political decisionmakers appears to exist despite increasing dependence on intelligence estimates in selecting and implementing foreign policy.

- The strength of the current Soviet-American detente appears to be capable of weathering serious crises. Both the United States and the

USSR seem to be learning that they have more to gain by cooperation than by confrontation when opportunism appears dangerous. It is clear, however, that the Soviet Union intends to act like a world power with strategic parity.

- Economic diplomacy, boycotts, and embargoes are becoming increasingly accepted tools of "crisis management," despite past failures of these techniques and a tendency to evoke a reaction opposite from that intended.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic surprise, as experienced in Pearl Harbor, Cuba, and the Middle East, will undoubtedly occur in the future. Analysts must be able to assemble seemingly irrelevant fragments of intelligence within a viable conceptual framework and act decisively to avoid escalation or to counter certain attack. Whether future threats involve nuclear destruction, limited conventional war, or merely confrontation and bluff, certain actions will be required.

There is a need to acquire greater diversity of viewpoints in the intelligence community and to encourage intellectual debate with nongovernmental scholars and specialists. Facts which seem to contradict "official intelligence policy" or "higher documents" should not automatically be dismissed or suppressed. The greatest danger to the effectiveness and utility of military planning documents is their tendency to inbreed. Related to this is the necessity of developing broader frames of reference, perhaps conflicting, in which to assemble, reassemble, and discard individual, unrelated bits of intelligence and in which to challenge the conventional wisdom.

While experience and some degree of specialization is essential, overspecialization in strategic intelligence should be avoided to reduce the tendency for "behavioral surprise." An analyst who has seen the Soviet Union or China consistently act a particular way will find it difficult if not impossible to perceive the unexpected. Frequent duty rotations and diversified training should therefore be encouraged, particularly for civilian Department of Defense personnel who may not have the enforced mobility of their military counterparts.

Information received from high-level overflights has been extremely valuable in collecting hard military intelligence. Although this information is basically valid and complete, it is frequently difficult to analyze. It does not always adequately inform decisionmakers of enemy

strategy, perceptions, and intentions. Such data can best be collected by traditional, covert methods. Data collected in this manner is particularly relevant to probable future crises which will involve proxies; which will be played out in precise, defined limits; and which will, during the period of detente, involve personalized, high-level diplomacy rather than unlimited military conflict. Dependence on secondary sources and the information provided by the agencies of friendly governments may be useful, but problems of suspicion, context, bias, and special interest make analysis difficult. In such an environment, additional emphasis should be given to more traditional intelligence gathering techniques.

Interdependence and the increasing importance of embargoes in diplomacy dictate that major analyses be made to determine US dependency on foreign sources of vital raw materials and the potential for conflict, shortages, and blackmail. A commitment to develop substitutes for those endangered products or to develop the capability for synthetic manufacture to satisfy future military and civilian requirements should follow. This was done with rubber after the Japanese aggression, and important new fuel substitutes will undoubtedly result from the latest Middle East crisis. Anticipation of future needs and a major research and development program could give the United States a significant strategic advantage in future crises as well as perform a major scientific and economic service for the nation and the world.

Interdepartmental politico-military gaming should be expanded and should involve important officials as well as their staffs. This would serve to increase training for leaders at the highest levels of government in the delicate art of crisis management and would perhaps increase the recognition of signals and help head off future crises.

Finally, since misperception of US will is often a result of a lack of public awareness, increased attention should be given to avoiding unnecessary classification and official secrecy. Some progress has been made in this area, but many official military documents are still routinely overclassified.

SUMMARY

Pearl Harbor, Cuba, and the 1973 Middle East War were three very different types of crises, yet in their diversity certain commonalities and lessons emerge which can contribute to improved strategic

planning. In all three of the crisis periods, the actors responded on the basis of their own national interests. Each crisis was preceded by numerous indicators which were incorrectly analyzed because of preconceived notions, stereotypes, and personal biases. Extraordinary and sometimes improvised methods of international diplomacy and communication were utilized in the search for solutions. Although fears of encirclement and containment influenced action and reaction, the importance of formal alliances was minor. The numbness which analysts felt in each crisis due to previous false alarms was exacerbated by enemy deception, restrictions on access to raw data, secrecy in decisionmaking, an abundance of irrelevant data, simple bad luck, delays, and technological and logistical surprises.

From these common elements certain lessons emerge. The importance of surprise, a credible deterrent, direct and constant communication among leaders, flexibility, deception, timing, and the maintenance of strategic mobility has been revalidated. While the importance attributed to alliances and their operation during crises has been shown to be exaggerated, it appears that the importance attributed to on-the-ground intelligence may have been unwisely minimized. No ultimate intelligence source is useful without sound political and behavioral analysis. Even then, we must accept that crises do not often develop as expected. This does not deny the proven need for long-range planning which allows the perception of more options and the time for more choice and commitment.

US national and popular will must be clearly demonstrated to ensure that American intentions are clearly understood by all potential adversaries. This objective can only be achieved by a strong military capability supported by an aware citizenry. Future crises similar to Pearl Harbor, Cuba, and the Middle East may be averted by such a demonstration of will. Frequent rotations of duty should be required to avoid overspecialization in strategic intelligence and improvisation should be encouraged in diplomacy and strategy formulation. A greater diversity of viewpoints should be encouraged and intellectual debate with nongovernmental scholars and specialists should be sought to challenge the conventional wisdom and limit inbreeding among intelligence documents. Also, increased attention should be given to the development of improved airlift and troop mobility capabilities and to the more traditional intelligence gathering activities. Finally, because of the increasing interdependence of economies and use of embargoes, a thorough analysis should be made of the sources of vital raw materials

and the potential for conflict and blackmail. A major R&D effort should then be undertaken to develop substitutes and synthetics.

Trends indicate that while interdependence, detente, sophistication in crisis handling, and international political diplomacy are becoming more important, so are economic boycotts and embargoes and an increased dependence on intelligence estimates in selecting and implementing foreign policy. In this environment, better strategic planning is more critical than ever before.

ENDNOTES

1. This chain of events is detailed in Herbert Fess, *The Road to Pearl Harbor*, 1950.
2. U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, *Pearl Harbor Attack*, 79th Congress, 2d Session, 1946, Part 14, p. 1407.
3. Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor, Warning and Decision*, 1962, pp. 382-386. Also see Roberta Wohlstetter, "Cuba and Pearl Harbor: Hindsight and Foresight," *Foreign Affairs*, pp. 691-707.
4. Details regarding these and many other warnings are available in U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, *Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, 1946, and in the Wohlstetter book and article, note 3.
5. See U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, *Investigations of the Preparedness Program, Interim Report on Cuban Military Buildup*, 1963.
6. Several books contain interesting detailed accounts of the Cuban Missile Crisis decisionmaking process. Among these are Eric Abel, *The Cuban Missile Crisis*, 1966; Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 1969; and Walter Wells Layson, *The Political and Strategic Aspects of the 1962 Cuban Crisis*, 1971.
7. Ole R. Holsti, "Cognitive Dynamics and Images of the Enemy: Dulles and Russia," in *Enemies in Politics*, 1967, ed. by Daniel J. Finley, p. 30.
8. Klaus Knorr, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Cuban Missiles," *World Politics*, April 1964, pp. 462-463.
9. Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*, 1962, p. 251.
10. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, *Investigation of the Preparedness Program, Interim Report on Cuban Military Buildup*, 1963, p. 3.

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